

Errors Analysis: A Case Study of Saudi Learner's English Grammatical Speaking Errors

Nesreen Saud Alahmadi

School Of Languages, cultures and Societies
University of Leeds, Leeds, United Kingdom

Abstract

In the field of language learning and teaching, the errors analysis in second language acquisition has become more wide spread in recent years. This is especially the case in regard to learners who are in the early stages of learning a second language. The analysis of the errors made by second language learners while they communicate in the target language has received tremendous attention and consideration by researchers, linguists and EFL teachers throughout the world. In this study, the most common grammatical speaking errors of Saudi learners in intermediate level of English language were investigated and analysed. The purpose of the analysis was to find out more about the most common speech errors that Saudi students commit during the second language learning process and to provide further knowledge regarding the source of these errors. Accordingly, Oral interviews were employed for the collection of data, as the analysis in this study is based on spoken English. A total number of 30 Saudi Arabian students were interviewed personally. Interviews were transcribed in order to be analysed.

Keywords; Error analysis, grammatical errors, first language interference, Saudi Arabia, speaking

Introduction

Speaking is a complex process even when one is doing so in one's first language. Naturally, it becomes even more complicated when speaking in a second language. Researchers have sought to identify the most common errors made by second or foreign language learners in their writing or speaking. Moreover, speaking and writing are considered to be productive skills; learners use their knowledge of the second language, English in the case of this study to communicate. Error analysis provides an in-depth understanding of language learning and enables finding out the source behind these errors in the process of second language learning. Additionally, it aids with the adoption of appropriate teaching strategies and methods to help raise students' awareness of learning a foreign language, including how to do so more effectively.

For researchers and learners, the investigation of errors whether they are semantics, syntactic or phonological, and especially the source of these errors, is important and has a significant impact on understanding the level of the language learner. It also helps to determine the sufficiency and appropriateness of the level of second language learners, which is indicated by the proficiency of language use in communication. Language proficiency and especially accuracy in speaking can stand as an obstacle to communication using the target language. In addition, the meaning of words and the correct use of sentence structures in the second language can be altered because of the incorrect use of tenses and verb forms. This incorrect use can be a result of various factors, which may include the interference of the first language or personal and environmental factors. The interference occurs because of the differences between the systems of the mother tongue and the target language. According to Ellis (1997), recent research gives significant attention to the systematic study of how people can acquire a second language and how the language itself can be learnt. Moreover, second language acquisition involves personal characteristics and environmental factors, both of which influence the learning process. These can be counted as the main sources of error production. The evidence presented in this paper provided linguists, practitioners and researchers with the opportunity to learn more about how errors are produced and to discuss why learners make errors, the present study will examine how errors are acquired, since it will give a clear indication of the major sources of errors produced by Saudi students. The different sources of errors can be classified according to their importance and consistency, which may aid in the further development of English language learning and teaching. The present paper will discuss the most common grammatical errors in terms of frequency, made by Saudi students in Saudi Arabia with a specific focus on Arabic-speaking learners acquiring English as a second language. Reviewing these errors will allow for a critical justification of why they were accrued. Indeed, they will be distinguished and described in each category in order to provide a valuable understanding of the source behind committing these errors by Saudi students while learning English. Moreover, In the process of analysing and classifying grammatical errors which were spontaneously produced by Saudi learners, nine major categories were chosen to represent the specific, important errors commonly made by Saudi learners; the classification of these errors was, initially, based on the comparison between the grammatical structures of the two languages, English and Arabic. Certain errors were, and some of these errors were assumed the result of language transfer and the transference of some Arabic elements to the English language. In addition, some reflect the conflict between the two systems, as students often transfer and overgeneralise the rules of the two languages. Thus, an in-depth analysis of these errors is provided, which is to say, a relationship among the errors spoken by students will be examined in order to provide an area of comparison of the error sources. This will include, for instance, the linguistic differences between Arabic and English, the unconscious

development of student errors and the positive and negative interferences, as the role of the second language will be reasonably discussed.

Background of error analysis

However, before mentioning the resulting classifications of errors, it is worth mentioning the famous classification of errors in the field of language study. Richards (1971), in his study involving learners from different language backgrounds, demonstrated different types of errors relating to the production and distribution of verb groups, prepositions, articles and the use of questions. Based on this, he distinguished three sources of errors (as cited in Heydari & Bagheri, 2012, p. 6).

1. Interference errors, resulting from the use of elements from one language while speaking or writing another,
2. Intralingual errors, reflecting general characteristics of learning rules, such as faulty generalisation, incomplete application of rules and failure to learn conditions under which rules apply,
3. Developmental errors, occurring when learners attempt to build up hypotheses about the target language based on limited experience.

Moreover, with improvements in the error analysis of adult learners of a second language, another important classification of errors has been added to the field of language study and error analysis. The classifications aid in understanding the sources of the errors as well as in justifying certain criteria chosen as the main guidelines for error analysis in this context. Though choosing a certain category is not easy, experts have also divided the error sources differently; for example, Schacheter and Celce-Murcia (1977) mentioned that distinguishing between intralingual and developmental errors is rather difficult. As a result, Richards (1974) classified errors into two categories according to their causes, which are as follows:

1. Interlingual errors: these errors are caused by mother tongue interference.
2. Intralingual and developmental errors: this kind of errors occurs during the learning process of the second language at a stage when the learners have not really acquired the knowledge. In addition, errors are also caused by the difficulty or the problem of language itself" (Heydari&Bagheri, 2012, p. 10).

Additionally, some experts believe that the distinction between intralingual and interlingual errors is not always as clear as is sometimes indicated. They also claim that it is more difficult to identify the various types of intralingual errors described by Richards (1971; as cited in Heydari & Bagheri, 2012). In order to deal with this problem, Dulay and Burt (1974) classified learners' errors into three broad categories:

1. Developmental errors, which are similar to first language (L1) acquisition errors,
2. Interference errors, which reflect the structure of the L1,
3. Unique errors, which are neither developmental nor interference errors.

Moreover, Heydari and Bagheri (2012; as cited in Brown, 1994; as cited in Hasyim, 2002) further classified sources of errors into the following categories:

1. Interference transfer, which is the negative influence of the learner's mother tongue,
2. Intralingual transfer, which is the negative transfer of items within the target language. In other words, the incorrect generalisation of the rules within the target language,

3. Context of learning, which overlaps both types of transfers. For example, the classroom with the teacher and its materials in the case of school learning, or the social situation in the case of untutored second language learning. In a classroom context, the teacher or the textbook can lead the learner to make a wrong generalisation about the language,
4. Communication strategies, which are the conscious employment of verbal mechanisms for communicating an idea when linguistic forms are not available to the learner for various reasons.

However, the categories mentioned are not limited to error classification, as the categories chosen to be represented in this case study are implied to have existed prior to the universal classification of errors. At the outset, it is still believed that the most frequent source of errors in second language acquisition no matter what the first language, is the transformation of rules from the first language to the foreign language. According to Collins in his study of errors analysis in second language learning, "learners of different L1 backgrounds may face similar types of challenges" (2007, p. 295). Thus, making decisions regarding the classification of errors and the most frequent grammatical errors is not an easy task, especially in speaking, as many language errors can be better focused and analysed in writing. The most frequent errors may differ from one learner to another, regardless of whether it is within the same context, within the same learning input or under individual circumstances.

Grammatical errors by Saudi Arabian students

Indeed, this study involved a thorough analysis of the data collected from a group of Saudi students. These students live and study in Saudi Arabia and still study at Tibah University in Madinah at the foundation year where this research was conducted. As will be discussed in detail later, a variety of grammatical errors were selected according to their consistency and frequency during students' speech. Accordingly, nine categories have been classified according to their consistency. These types of errors will be presented as the following classifications; unmarked form of verbs, misuse of the verb tense, misuse of articles, misuse of singular and plural, misuse of prepositions, use of sentences without a verb, sentences with pronoun copy, third person pronouns, and misuse of regular and irregular verbs. As the title indicates, only grammatical speaking errors will be the focus of this study. Syntactical transfer errors will consequently be discussed in depth. However, there will be no attempt made to compare or analyse the semantic features (lexical or idiomatic), use of vocabulary or phonological features, although these are important aspects of speaking, especially with regard to pronunciation. The diagram(A) shows the average number of grammatical errors categorised according to their consistency.

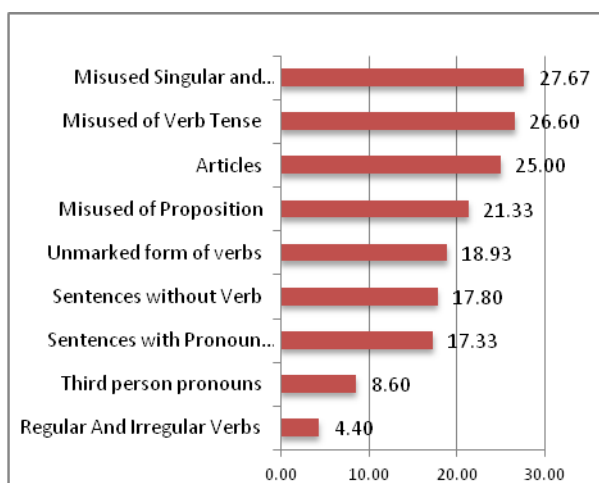


Diagram (A): Frequency of grammatical errors by type in Saudi Arabia

1. Misuse of singular and plural nouns

The first most frequent kind of error to be discussed among Saudi students studying in Saudi Arabia is the “misuse of singular and plural”. In this particular category, and according to the data and the number of errors calculated, Saudi students committed the highest number of errors in this category with an average number of 27.67 as illustrated in diagram (A). One student from this group committed the same error almost 50 times during 15 minutes of speech, although the minimum number was almost quite high compared with other types of errors but was less likely to be the least. It was almost committed at least 13 times by one of the Saudi students in this group. However, the English noun is defined as “a word that is used to name any person, animal, thing, idea, state, or quality (Russell, 1993, p. 16). In addition, according to Scott & Tucker, who analysed syntactic errors, singular and plural nouns can be defined as the following: “singular nouns which should have been plurals, singular nouns incorrectly marked **as** plurals, incorrectly formed plurals, and non-count nouns used with the plural marker” (1974, p. 22).

As a result, student errors will be divided into two main types, in order to identify the source of these errors. These types are as follows:

1.1 Errors with plural nouns

With this type of error students tend to mark plural nouns with singular forms. Many Saudi students in this group committed the same type of mistake when facing problems with the plural form of singular nouns in English. For instance:

1- I think this successful than reading book.

2- To skip the important thing.

From the previous examples, it is obvious that Saudi students experience difficulty when it comes to changing the singular nouns into the correct plural form in English. First of all, it would be useful to point out that English is “an inflectional language, in which prefixes or suffixes play a significant grammatical role” (Fromkin & Rodman, 1998, as cited in **Jing, Tindall & Nisbet**, 2006, p. 5). These prefixes and suffixes play a major rule in formatting the nouns and verbs, such as adding an “s” to change the singular form to plural. According to the literature, during the

early stages, or at intermediate level, most ESL learners of English face difficulty in correctly forming and using English grammar in term of forms. This results in a reliance on their prior knowledge in order to form the components of the English language structure. Mohamed, Goh & Eliza (2004) have indicated that pinpoint misuse of singular and plural forms is one of the most common grammatical errors in English writing among Chinese students. According to the data, Saudi students in this group were unable to determine whether certain forms of English words were singular or plural. As illustrated in the examples, they often simplified the nouns without using the "s" at the end of the words, even though the rule of adding "s" to make singular forms plural is far from new. Indeed, Saudi students have been studying this rule since commencing their English studies in school curriculum. However, in order to gain a better understanding of this phenomenon among students, it is worth noting that they literally transfer the element of meaning of Arabic language, (their L1) into English as they do not literally use the form of the rule in the English language.

1.2 Errors with singular nouns:

With regard to these types of errors, students tend to face difficulty when it comes to certain English nouns, as they are unable to determine whether these words are singular or plural. For example, they substitute certain plural nouns with the singular form, as seen below:

1- The teacher give us a lot of homeworks.

2- There is a competitions.

In these examples, students treated the words "homeworks", "competitions" and as though they were plural in meaning. This is similar to the Arabic language. Indeed, these different words are usually used as plural nouns when expressed in Arabic. However, the English language, on the other hand, uses both the singular and plural form for the same words, although this is in accordance with the different contexts and according to the subject-verb agreement, such as the "verb to be" (is, are, etc.). "Some words that end with the plural form 's' are actually singular in number, whereas others indicate a singular or plural number while maintaining the same form (Kinneavy & Warriner, 1993, pp. 712,972). Indeed, students relied on both the structure of forms and meaning of the Arabic language. In addition to this, they occasionally tended to simplify the rule in English which is due to their intralanguage knowledge of English in this particular category.

2. Misuse of verb tenses

The correct use of verb tenses is a somewhat problematic area to analyse. According to the data, a high percentage of Saudi students mixed different forms of verb tenses. Almost every student in this group committed this error at least 20 times throughout their speech. In fact, the nature of the task given to them shed more light on these types of grammatical errors Students were switching between tenses even when they had the opportunity to correct themselves. However, with this said, any errors in tense which students were able to correct themselves were excluded from the data, as the major concern of the present study is to determine which types of errors are considered a problem in oral production of the English language. In total, three different types of these errors in grammatical tenses were recorded as follows:

2.1 Misuse of Past tense:

- Last year I had Diploma and come here to complete a degree” instead of “came here.

The other type of misuse of tenses is:

2.2 Misuse of Present tense:

Students tended to switch between different present tenses such as mixing between present simple and continuous: for example:

- I am study English from the intermediate school.

In addition, a similar type of error occurred with the use of future tense:

2.3 Misuse of Future tense:

The following examples explain some of the students' errors when it came to the future tense, with many of them mixing up the present and the future tense in the third part of the interview, when students were asked to talk about their future plans, such as:

- I set front of the TV, I'll be online.

In fact, this type of grammatical error is indicative of a real problem faced by Saudi students; According to the literature, misuse of the verb tenses by second language learners has been divided into two main categories; either the misuse of verb tenses which results in errors like those in 1- “tense sequence: where learners of English may use present simple with past simple tenses particularly with compound and complex sentences” (Noor, 1996, p. 4), or 2- “Tense substitution”, where learners substitute one verb of English tense into another (Noor, 1996). This led students to use different types of verb tenses when they produced a different structure of sentences as indicated in the examples given above. This was illustrated in the examples, with students mixing between the present tense and the future tense when they wanted to describe an action which will happen in the future. Indeed, the tense of sequences was identified as a problem for students and resulted in such errors. In fact, according to Noor (1996), El-Sayed (1983), Arab learners tend to face this problem with tenses when they express themselves in English, as expressing an action using a verb in Arabic requires the use of only one tense. This is in contrast with the English language, where the use of two different tenses can be used in one sentence, although Arabic does not have this kind of language structure. Indeed, this type of error can clearly be identified as “Negative transfer”, with students following the same pattern of their first language “Arabic”. This justifies, to a certain some extent, the fact that Saudi students follow Arabic structure when it comes to this type of error.

Referring to this example in particular, it could be seen as a result of interference from L1, as in English verbs are inflected according to time (tenses), as is the case in the previous examples.

3. Misuse of articles

Following the first two categories, students in Saudi Arabia found the use of “English articles” another problem when producing English sentences during speech. As a matter of fact, almost every student in this particular group committed this type of error at least 22 times during approximately 12 minutes of speech with an average number of 25.0 among the total of other types of errors. This indicated that Saudi students have a real problem when it comes to the correct and appropriate use of English articles. In reference to English language grammar, the use of articles is divided into two main types: definite and indefinite articles. These articles are considered to be adjectives, as they are usually used before a noun in the English language. According to the Oxford dictionary, “definite articles” refer to the word “the” as it is indicative of something specific. On the other hand, the “indefinite articles” unusually refer to the use of “an” and “a” which indicate something unspecific. As a result, errors will be classified according to those two types:

3.1 Definite articles

These types of grammatical errors were noted as being the most common among Saudi students studying in Saudi Arabia. Students tended to describe particular nouns as definite due to the fact that they had not referred to them previously in their speaking context and as such assumed that the interviewer knew what they were talking about. This made their sentences a little awkward when listening to their recorded speech. Moreover, students tended to commit two types of errors with regard to the definite articles:

3.1.1 Definite articles deletion:

Students guilty of this mistake would delete the definite articles from the sentences, and produce full sentences with no mention of articles, such as in the following examples:

1- Since I was in second grades.

These kinds of errors were most noticeable among students as they produced specific sentences with no reference to articles or when speaking about something they had already mentioned, as illustrated in the previous example. The second type of error committed with definite articles was;

3.1.2 Definite articles Redundancy

This error refers to the type of sentence employed by students when using articles to define nouns which are already definite, such as the following:

1- It was the only choice here in the Madinah.

As reported in the literature, Arab students tend to refer to nouns with both types of articles; they are either “definite or indefinite”. According to Noor, (1996), who observed these kinds of errors, he said errors are to “be attributed to negative transfer from mother tongue since Arabic marks the nouns in some linguistic contexts of English language as definite nouns” (p. 18). However, this study reported indefinite articles as the most important type of error due to first language interference. Saudi students in this group committed the most frequent errors, with definite articles also appearing to be most common; even more so than indefinite articles. This could also be related to their interlanguage system, as the Arabic language clearly has this kind of structure. The other type of error when it comes to articles is the “indefinite article” which appeared, at least among this group, to be less common.

3.2 Indefinite articles

With this type of error students tended to substitute definite articles with indefinite, particularly when they were trying to use one complex sentence followed by a short sentence, as seen below:

1- My city always sunny and warm, I see a rains.

2- I take a ride, I went around London, in a sea.

The literature reported that deletion of indefinite articles is most common among Arab learners, and is definitely an example of first language interference (Scott & Tucker, 1974) “Arabic marks nouns as definite or indefinite by the presence or absence of the article. Errors of omission of the indefinite article in English are, attributable to MT interference” (Scott & Tucker, 1974, p. 18). Moreover, some errors with articles could not be identified as definite or indefinite as certain nouns in English require indefinite articles but require no article in Arabic, such as “the something go beneath him in the room”. Indeed, the noun “something” requires no article either in English or in Arabic. This kind of error fits into the category of “unique errors” committed by learners, with the source of such errors would be difficult to identify.

4. Misuse of preposition

According to the data, prepositions appear to be in the middle of the list of grammatical errors, as a source of difficulty for Saudi students in Saudi Arabia. As a matter of fact, the number relating to errors with prepositions was quite surprising, as each student had committed this type of error 14 times during 15 minutes of speech in the recorded interviews with an average number of 21.33 among all errors. Before beginning to analyse the errors which occur with the use of prepositions, it would be useful to point out that English prepositions are considered to be a source of difficulty not only for Saudi students but for all learners of English. As Pittman (1966) described, "prepositions have earned a reputation for difficulty if not a downright unpredictability". In light of this, huge emphasis was placed on establishing the source of this type of error in the case of Saudi students. With regard to this, (Chalker cited in Alayesh), pointed out that the following prepositions are the most frequent when it comes to the use of spoken English language, namely "at, by, for, from, in, on, to and with" (1992, p. 217, Alayesh, 2012). However, in reference to the literature, errors with prepositions are divided into three types, namely errors with omission or deletion, substitution and redundancy (Scott & Tucker, 1974, Noor, 1996). Errors with omission appear when learners use sentences with a deletion of the preposition, thus resulting in sentences without prepositions. Moreover, substitution occurs when learners substitute one preposition of English with another. Finally, there are errors of redundancy, which indicate the use of unnecessary prepositions in the production of English sentences. However, the first two types will be analysed in more detail as they are shown to be the most frequent types of error in this case study. Indeed, they were even more frequent than redundancy of preposition, which appeared to be less common among Saudi learners.

4.1 Errors with preposition omission

With this type of error, Saudi students tended to omit some English prepositions when attempting to produce sentences in English. As a result of certain similarities between Arabic and English in both structure and prepositions, students tended to use English prepositions correctly when there was an equivalent in Arabic. As well as this, errors seemed to be obvious when there was no direct equivalent in Arabic for the English preposition. For example;

1- I want stay here.

2- Her father did not agree let him.

The omission of the preposition "to, with," respectively, indicated that students are literally transferring the structure and the use of prepositions of Arabic language into English, as these sentences, with their current structure, are correctly used in Arabic, although this is not the case in English.

4.2 Errors with preposition substitution

As mentioned in the literature and previous studies related to errors with prepositions, "preposition substitution" seems to be a source of difficulty for English language learners, regardless of their language level. In this case study, Saudi students recorded some errors with prepositions as a result of replacing one preposition with another, thus leading to inaccurate English sentences.

For example:

1- I can't remember what the name was for English

2- Cut classes to two hours

In the examples above, the incorrect use of the other prepositions such as “for” in the first sentence, indicated that students neither use Arabic structure nor English structure in the production of such an error. The use of “for” in the first example is incorrect both in English and Arabic. When students use their intralanguage structure, in this case “English”, they tend to develop their own rules and build on their own unconscious development for the new structure of the English language, which is possibly considered a positive sign of learning to use the new language structure rather than yielding to interference from their mother tongue, namely “Arabic”.

4.3 Errors with preposition redundancy

However, the literature reported that with this specific classification of preposition-related errors, which are defined as preposition redundancy, learners, somewhat unusually, face difficulties, as they may use unnecessary prepositions in some English sentences, thus leading to inaccurate production of the English language as a result of “negative transfer” from first language, (see Noor, 1996, Meziani, 1984). With this said however, Saudi students did not seem to fit into this category, as according to data, only 8 out of 30 students used unnecessary prepositions in some sentences which, thus resulting in language errors such as;

- My class mates in inside the community college.

The use of “in” in this sentence represent an example of using an unnecessary preposition in oral production, which could well fit into the “unique type of errors”, according to Heydari & Bagheri, who defined these as “errors that are neither developmental nor interference which resulted from incorrect instruction of the language” (2012, p 8).

5. Unmarked form of verbs

The “unmarked form of verbs” was a very common and significant grammatical error among Saudi students, First of all, a definition of the “unmarked form of verb given by Dictionary of English Grammar, Penguin, 2000, “cited in Trask, (2000)”. “The unmarked form is the 'ordinary' or 'basic' form, while the . . . marked form differs from the first in containing extra material or in being confined to special contexts such as, suffice, prefixes , passive, etc”. This was marked by work from Richard (1970), and Corder (1974), who first introduced the concept of the “Intralingual and developmental errors” in second language learning process and stated that “this kind of error occurs during the learning process of the second language at a stage when the learners have not really acquired the knowledge. For example, certain errors were highlighted in the data, for example;

- My sister take her Ph.D.
- I am study in the intermediate course.

The use of the infinitive form of the verb in the previous sentences reflects a gap in knowledge when it comes to using the correct form of grammatical tenses and rules, particularly when they must be applied to a certain context. It is true that these kinds of errors could be explained according to the “Intralingual and developmental errors” as they obviously reflect a lack of knowledge or difficulty in the target language itself. Hence, Saudi students made lots of error in using the correct form of the verb and few performed well with agreement as they use the same Arabic patterns and apply them to their use of the English structure where more verb-subject

agreement is required. In other words, using a simple form of the verb without paying attention to the tense used in the sentence or even to the agreement between verb and subject which results in using the unmarked form of the verb can be interpreted as a lack of knowledge of rules according to the explanation of the “interlanguage errors”.

Perhaps in this way, a better justification of this type of error with “the unmarked form of verbs” in the Saudi learners' speech can be seen as a result of “interlanguage errors”.

Indeed, the argument is supported by the present study, and by the number of errors highlighted, specifically 464 errors committed by the 30 students during 10 minutes of speech and an average of 18.93 among the same group. This could well be indicative of strong structure transfer from the Arabic language into English structure. Although the learners were not in the early stages of language learning, they should have had enough knowledge regarding the structure of the English language.

6. Use of sentences without verb

Based on the data of this study, another category of errors among the students in Saudi Arabia, and indeed one of the most frequent errors, was the classification of using sentences without a verb, the average number of errors was only 17 among this group, which is not particularly high in comparison to the other highlighted types of grammatical errors, each student committed this error at least 13 times during their speech. Indeed, it is possible to infer from this that omitting verbs from sentences is considered to be an area of difficulty which should be pointed out in this case study.

Based on the literature, similar studies have found that, for some English learners, especially in their early stages, they face difficulty in applying the rule of English copula, “Copula(tive) is a term used in grammatical description to refer to a linking verb i.e. a verb which has little independent meaning, and whose main function is to relate other elements of clause structure, especially subject and complement” (Tahir, 2009, p. 3, cited in Jafri, 2013). This is close to the classification of errors with verb- formation. (Noor, 1996) Alternatively, this is quite common for English learners, and according to these studies learners delete the English copula as a result of their intralanguage, and particularly learners with low language proficiency. However, two types of errors in verb-less sentences have been highlighted in this study, namely sentences “Deletion of the verb to be as a main verb”, and Deletion of the verb to be as a helping verb”: both of which will be discussed in more detail.

6.1 Production of sentence without verb

The most significant type of error within sentences is the application of the “verb to be” rule. Saudi students tend to either delete the verb “be” in some sentences when it is considered a main verb, or delete the verb when it is used in a sentence as a helping verb, particularly when they are used in different tenses. For example:

6.1.1 Deletion of the verb to be as a main verb:

- I can't remember, they many writers.

As can be seen from the above examples, students produced incomplete sentences of English and deleted “to be” verbs such as “Am. Is. Are”. They produced sentences which contained only

nouns, without referring to any form of verb in these sentences, though the use of verbs are considered to be main verbs in the previous sentences. However, there may well be a simple explanation behind these errors if we compare the structure of Arabic language with the structure of English in these specific examples. We find neither the deep structure nor the surface structure of Arabic use of the verb “to be”. Following the structure of the above mentioned example, such as “they many writers, we beginners, when we small, no other university”, we found that students were following the same patterns of their native language, which, in this study, is Arabic. It was also evident that students were literally transferring the structure of Arabic language into the use of English

6.1.2 Deletion of the verb to be as a helping verb:

As a matter of fact, the deletion of the verb “to be” in oral production of English language sentences was more frequent than other type. More specifically, and according to the data, Saudi students tended to produce this error when using more complex sentences, especially when they used sentences with more than one relative clause, or when using different tenses in the same sentence. Consider the following example:

- We having the same different average in each term.

The omission of the verb “to be” as a helping verb appeared to be more frequent occasionally, when it came to the use of sentences which required a present continuous tense. The jumping between two tenses in one sentence, such as the present and past, led students to focus on picking the correct tense while neglecting the major rule of the helping verbs “be”. However, one can conclude that the verb “to be” was omitted, whether required in a sentence as a main verb or as a helping verb. This was due to the fact that students relied on transferring an element of the Arabic language into the use of English structure, resulted as a source of “inter -language errors”.

7. Third person pronouns

According to the research findings, each student who participated in this study, misused third person pronouns a minimum of seven times during their speech. The number of this type of error is indicated throughout the data with an average of 8.60 errors when compared to other type of student errors highlighted in this study; however, third person pronoun errors were reproduced by every student in this group, thus indicating a systematic problem that must be addressed if pronouns are to be applied correctly by Saudi students. Errors with third person pronouns have been classified into two categories, subjective and objective, as discussed in detail below.

7.1 Third person pronouns: “subjective case”

The English language pronoun in the subjective case has been explained by Oxford Grammar as follows: “The use of person pronouns fit under the rule of using “he, she, it” in the case of singular pronouns and the use of “they” in the case of plural pronouns” (2014).

Consider the following examples:

- (1) I have one brother, she is at high school.
- (2) Me and my mother, it love swimming.

A close look at these examples reveals that, overall, students were able to express themselves and communicate using the target language; however, the errors (using “she” when referring to a

brother; referring to a mother by the pronoun “it” instead of “she”) indicate a common problem with applying the rules correctly. The substitution of these pronouns reflects a gap in the knowledge of their correct usage, despite the fact that students at this particular stage of learning English should have become aware of these rules after studying them for a minimum six years in the Saudi English curriculum. These errors cannot simply be referred to as a negative transfer from the speaker's mother tongue, in this case Arabic, as the Arabic language involves similar variations in the number and gender of pronouns, which should allow for correct application in foreign contexts. This type of error, particularly with subjective person pronouns, could be interpreted as a developmental or ‘intralanguage’ error; Saudi students might know the rules but fail to apply them, especially in oral production, using them correctly in written form but not in spoken production. According to Cook (1999), this pattern of errors made by second language learners may be a product of the developmental stage in learning: “second language users differ from monolingual native speakers in their knowledge of their L2 and L1 and in some of their cognitive processes” (p. 185). The second type of third person pronoun errors will be discussed below.

8.2 Third person pronouns: “objective case”

The second type of error in this category refers to the use of the objective case with third person pronouns. The objective case uses the pronouns “him, her, it” in the singular form and “they” in the plural form. Third person possessive pronouns are “his, her, its, hers” in the singular, and “their, theirs” in the plural (see Oxford Grammar, 2014).

The Saudi students in this study committed errors most frequently when using objective and possessive third person pronouns, as each student in this group repeated this type of error a minimum of nine and eleven times respectively. The following examples from the transcribed data have been highlighted for discussion:

- (1) She married with his husband.
- (2) Everybody depend on himself.

As seen in these examples, the errors made in this grammatical category differ compared to those with the subjective pronoun, and more errors of this type were committed. The above examples are still considered to be the result of developmental errors, as students were uncertain as to the correct use of third person pronouns, in particular when mixing the singular and plural forms. Existing literature has reported that learner errors such as mixing between objective and subjective third person pronouns, as occurred in this study, can be interpreted as a result of the context of learning. According to Brown (1980 cited in Hasyim, 2002), this involves the overlap of interlanguage; “errors resulting from the use of elements from one language while speaking/writing another”, and intralanguage; “errors reflecting general characteristics of the rule learning such as faulty generalization, incomplete application of rules and failure to learn conditions under which rules apply”. (Richards, 1971, p. 3, cited in Heydari & Bagheri, 2012). Heydari and Bagheri described the source of this type of error as “the classroom with the teacher and its materials in the case of school learning or the social situation in the case of untutored second language learning. In a classroom context, the teacher or the textbook can lead the learner to make wrong generalization about the language” (2012, p.10).

Conclusion

To sum up, the figures mentioned earlier which concluded the most significant and frequent grammatical errors made by Saudi students, who live in Saudi Arabia and study English for six

years, where most categories has been analysed according to their source in this paper. The most problematic errors were analysed, and their sources were discussed. Moreover, errors which been classified in this study is not limited to the categories mentioned. There are some unique errors such as , the use of “perfect tense” which was almost neglected to be used by students in Saudi Arabia, as only 6 out of the 30 students have been found to use “past or present perfect tense”. Additionally, The above mentioned categories have been chosen according to the majority of errors committed by Saudi students, in addition to grammatical errors with the use of sentences with pronoun copying, and errors with regular and irregular verbs, which are less common among other types of errors, as illustrated in diagram (A). However, identifying the definite source of these errors is not an easy task. As most of these errors were due to the mother tongue interference, which may support recent studies of the importance of the role played by first language and in which has a great impact on the process of second language learning.

About the Author:

Nesreen Saud Alahmadi is currently a PhD candidate at Leeds University researching in the field of English teaching and second language acquisition. I obtained a master degree in TESOL studies from Leeds University (2010). I have extensive teaching experience in language teaching in primary, high schools, and Teaching English at a Medical college in Saudi Arabia (2011).

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